Inclusion *in* Practice

Case Study:

Percy Shurmer Academy

How Percy Shurmer Academy uses a flight path system to support all pupils with SEND

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A key principle of SEND practice this case study exemplifies:

Strategies that work for pupils with SEND can work for all pupils across a school.

At a glance

- Percy Shurmer Academy develops a pathway for each pupil to reach age-related expectations (ARE) or secondary school readiness. They refer to this as their 'flight path strategy'.

- Every pupil has their own flight path. This includes data on their starting point, and a visual trajectory which indicates to teachers and leaders what progress each pupil needs to make over time to reach ARE by the end of year 6.

- Staff use this information to regularly and collaboratively reflect on pupils' progress, and adapt their approach when needed.

- The system encourages staff to take a long-term and strategic view of how to support each pupil, and has supported strong outcomes for pupils with SEND.

Background information

Percy Shurmer Academy is a two-form entry primary school in central Birmingham with a deaf learning resource base and a nursery. It is part of Lift Schools.

Percy Shurmer
Academy
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What challenges were you trying to address?

How the project started:

Leaders introduced the whole school strategy after observing that:

- Some pupils were not sufficiently prepared for the transition to secondary school.

- Sometimes there was a delayed recognition of certain pupils' needs, which led to delayed interventions to support them.

- Some pupils with SEND found it difficult to build core knowledge, made more difficult by an overloaded curriculum.

Aims of this work:

Leaders' aim with the flight path strategy is for no pupil to leave primary school without being fully prepared for secondary education. The strategy was developed to:

- Embed high expectations for all pupils.

- Closely monitor each pupil's progress and identify learning needs early.

- Implement targeted interventions promptly and effectively, preventing last-minute catch-up efforts.

- Ensure continuity and consistency in pupil support across all year groups.

Through this strategy, leaders aim to bring together a wide range of stakeholders to review and support pupils' progress collaboratively. This includes class teachers, subject leaders, senior leaders, external professionals, and specialists.

What challenges were you trying to address? (continued)

The approach:

The flight path strategy was initially designed to support deaf learners. Leaders were influenced by research[1] which highlights that:

- Hearing loss does not determine a pupil's cognitive ability, language development, or educational trajectory.

- Two pupils with the same profound hearing loss may present with entirely different learning profiles, depending on factors like early exposure to language, level of family or community support, and the use of assistive technology.

This led leaders to move away from a one-size-fits-all model to support deaf learners, to the personalised flight path strategy to consider pupils' individual needs.

A key decision was then made to apply this philosophy to all pupils in the school. Here, leaders were also influenced by evidence from the Education Endowment Foundation on targeted support.[2] This demonstrates:

- That strategies that support deaf learners often benefit other pupils with SEND, and their peers.

- The importance of early intervention and targeted support, alongside high quality teaching.

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1. Knoors and Marschark (2014) *Teaching Deaf Learners: Psychological and Developmental Foundations*
2. For example, see Targeted academic support | EEF (last accessed October 2025)

What does it look like in practice?

What each pupil's flight path looks like

Each pupil's flight path includes:

- An assessment of their starting point.

- Aspirational targets for academic success and secondary school readiness; these targets are informed by Lift Schools trust-wide aim for 90% of GCSE pupils to be scoring grade 4 or above in English and maths by 2028.

- Specific markers, which show the trajectory required over time for pupils to reach the targets, and ARE by the end of year 6.

- Insights from teacher observations and case studies.

What does it look like in practice? (continued)

How staff use pupils' flight paths

Leaders allocate 2.5 hours per year group, each term, for staff to plan and refine pupils' flight paths.

Staff play different roles:

- Class teachers deliver high quality, responsive teaching and use the data on pupils' progress to adapt their practice

- Subject leads monitor pupils' progress against the curriculum

- SEND specialists provide expert guidance and lead targeted support for pupils, where necessary

- Inclusion team members monitor the impact of interventions, and identify ways to deliver this efficiently, such as grouping pupils across year groups

- External professionals provide guidance on pupils' development (this includes insights from speech and language therapists, educational psychologists, and sensory support teams)

- Senior leaders oversee the strategy as a whole, track the progress of cohorts, and ensure everyone is accountable to each other.

In their meetings, staff reflect together on the information they have using key prompts – they ask each other what needs to change, and how they can adapt their approach to ensure pupil success.

Staff use the information they have on pupils' progress to inform real-time decisions about where targeted support is necessary – and if so, which targeted interventions are selected.

Professional development

Training on this strategy is embedded in the school's annual programme of professional development. The aim of this training is to introduce, and then regularly revisit, the data-driven approach – with an aim of ensuring staff are confident in using data to track pupil's progress and respond adaptively.

What has been the impact?

In 2024, 90% of pupils at Percy Shumer Academy met expected standards in reading, writing and maths. This compares to an average of 61% both locally and nationally.

To measure the impact of the flight path system, leaders also at the percentage of pupils achieving Year Level of Material (YLM). This is a measure developed by Lexia, to compare a pupil's progress to the typical level for their year group. Leaders track the percentage of pupils below, in, or above YLM from their starting point to the current day.

For example, the chart below shows the proportion of year 4 pupils who started and are currently in YLM, from September 2024 to May 2025. It shows that while 100% of the 20 pupils started below YLM, 40% progressed into YLM over the academic year:

Students by Year Level of Material (YLM) in Year 4

Start	100%	
Current	60%	40%

Below YLM · In YLM · Above YLM

20 Students | Movement into In/Above 40%
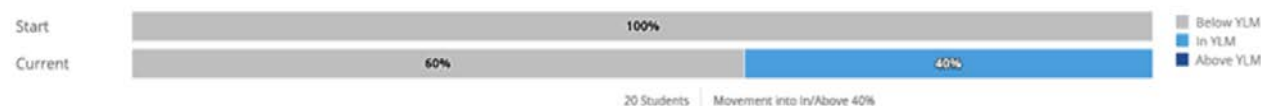
The school's Ofsted report in 2023 also highlighted the strength of leadership in supporting pupils with SEND, noting that, "Leaders are highly effective in ensuring all pupils with SEND are successful in school. Pupils with SEND achieve exceptionally well."

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Oftsed Report, 2023

The key factors that make it work

Leaders have identified the following key behaviours and content that have made this approach effective in their setting.

- **Shared responsibility:** Progress tracking is not the responsibility of a single role or team; it is a whole-school effort. Every staff member plays a part in monitoring and supporting pupil progress.

- **A long-term view:** The strategy enables staff to see what progress looks like over time, helping them remain focused on long-term gains even when immediate progress is slower.

- **Early identification of need:** This approach enables staff to identify learning gaps at the earliest opportunity, and implement targeted support at the right time.

- **Open dialogue:** Staff are encouraged to have honest and robust conversations with each other, ensuring that all perspectives are considered when making decisions for pupils.

- **Sharing expertise:** Collaboration with other schools in the Midlands regional group significantly strengthened this approach. Sharing effective practices, challenges, and solutions was invaluable for staff.

- **Ongoing review:** There is a continued focus on how to make adjustments to the strategy, and continue to ensure that no pupil's potential is underestimated, and that any interventions needed are introduced in a timely way.

Further reading and resources

Leaders have shared some examples of resources they consulted throughout this process, which they would recommend other school and trust leaders to consider in their own contexts.

- See [research by Knoors and Marschark (2014)](#) on insights for teaching deaf learners.

- See information on [Lexia's reading programme](#) and the [Education Endowment Foundation's review of Lexia interventions](#) for more information about the literacy programme used by the school.

- See the [Education Endowment Foundation's guidance](#) on targeted academic support for more information about how to implement these effectively.

- See the [Education Endowment Foundation's insights into selecting interventions](#) for insights into which factors to consider when choosing specific interventions.

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